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It is appropriate at this point of the magazine to wish our readers world over all the best of the season's greetings. No doubt next year will be just as exciting as 2006. Generally, it has been an interesting one, even if it

has not been a financial bonanza for all. Technologically speaking, some milestones have been achieved and there are more in prospect.

Xmas is coming

Xmas is always a good time for technology. Gadgets are on nearly everyone's wish list. Phones are continuing to evolve and the market has become even broader thanks to the new family of more austere handsets coming onto the market. Seems the marketers have figured out the appeal of basic phones that just communicate without all the bells and whistles.

Some designers will be pleased about these phones. There will be an irreducible amount of amplifiers and switches etc. in them and battery life should be longer without the power drain of cameras and MP3 players. Overall, the trend should ensure demand for chips should remain high. However, it is likely that the margins will be paired even thinner, making profitability troublesome. That said, it is likely that the chips to be used will be ones which are a way up the line and will be cheaper to produce.

Entertainment is a key area for III-Vs; this year saw the debut of what some are calling Fifth Generation games consoles. Sony has a lot riding on its PS3 but Microsoft beat them all with its Xbox 360 months ago.

Nevertheless, being first is not always a good thing. Sony needed some good news after the recent laptop battery scandal and it must have been pleased with the generally good reception for the PS3. It leads the way in several respects, not the least being its inclusion of the first violet laser in a console. However, if rumours are to be believed, it must be holding its breath over the lifetime of these critical components. The PS3 is the first full-scale commercialisation of the VLD, albeit only as read-only, so the world will be watching too. Industry sources estimate that Sony is taking a loss of \$306 on each console even

though in Japan over 8800 PS3 consoles were sold over the launch weekend. By far, that is the most VLDs sold to date, establishing the viability of the device in the consumer market sector.

Sony must also be worried about the other console launch, the Nintendo Wii. Perhaps astutely, Nintendo opted for less risky storage media. That is not to say this console is not a step forward. Some pundits foresee its unique user interface as revolutionising gaming (do a Google search to find out why). This household anticipates our TV being taken up with the Wii over Xmas. While it has sensibly deferred BR or HD optical storage, Nintendo's unique controllers work using IR LEDs.

Industry observers are also very interested in the microprocessor driving the Wii. Inside is an IBM Gateway chip – likely the first large-scale application of this new device and what's more it is based on SOI.

Recently, I visited the city of Birmingham and wandered beneath the Xmas lights. If anyone needed proof that the nitrides have arrived, one only has to look around the shops. Most cities are festooned with excitingly different pendulous illuminations exploiting the unique characteristics of HB-LEDs. Into the bargain, they save on cost – with lower electricity bills and less maintenance. Incidentally, we were on our way to a rock concert where once again LEDs made for a dazzling light show impossible just a few years ago.

It is highly reassuring to see first-hand that compound semiconductors are by no means a mined-out seam. There will be much to gather in, assimilate, and report in the New Year.

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